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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1268
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RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0003
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0009
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1060
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0253
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHMFIISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000340

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PKO](#) [FJ](#)

SUBJECT: FIJI'S REVIEW OF PKO: PROSPECTS FOR IRAQ, LEBANON, AND ELSEWHERE

REF: A. SUVA 173 AND PREVIOUS

- [1B.](#) SUVA 214
- [1C.](#) SUVA 254
- [1D.](#) SUVA 255
- [1E.](#) SUVA 137
- [1F.](#) SUVA 92
- [1G.](#) SUVA 323

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

[¶1.](#) (C) The Fiji Government is reviewing its participation in peacekeeping operations (PKO) globally. Current deployments include to the MFO in the Sinai, with UNAMI in Iraq, and in Bosnia and Sudan. Prospectively, Fiji has requests to resume participation in UNIFIL in Lebanon and to join the Coalition of the Willing in Iraq. The context for the PKO review includes past civil-military frictions, casualties among Fiji-civilian contractors in Iraq, the need to keep remittances flowing, and, importantly, the good will Fiji achieves from its proud PKO record. We hear the Fiji Cabinet will likely approve a modest deployment to UNIFIL shortly. Prospects for joining the Iraq Coalition are less clear but we continue to lobby. End summary.

Fiji's respected PKO history: a review

[¶2.](#) (U) The Government of Fiji has been undertaking a review of its participation in peacekeeping operations (PKO). Fiji has been a long and proud contributor: with MFO in the Sinai for over 20 years; with UNIFIL in Lebanon for over 20 years before departing when the UN downsized there; as force-protectors with UNAMI in Iraq; and in such other locations as Bosnia, East Timor, the Sudan, and with the RAMSI regional force in the Solomon Islands. In addition, many Fiji citizens, nearly all of them ex-soldiers from the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), have taken jobs abroad with private security companies, particularly in Kuwait and Iraq. Fiji deaths in Iraq, to date, have all been private-security contractors, and there has been little public reaction, though PM Qarase did suggest Fijian civilians should look for safer job opportunities at home.

Civil-military friction has lessened but is a factor

¶3. (C) Part of the unstated context during the initiation of Fiji's PKO review was surely the severe frictions that had dominated the relationship between RFMF Commander Bainimarama and the civilian government, including with Home Affairs Minister Vosanibola and Prime Minister Qarase (ref A). After May elections vividly illustrated that ethnic-Fijians (the RFMF's base) strongly supported PM Qarase's party (ref B) and after Qarase established a functioning multi-party cabinet (ref C), Bainimarama and his spokesmen toned down their rhetoric. In June, Bainimarama and Minister Vosanibola held a reconciliation session to patch over wounds and move forward (ref D); however, scars remain.

Iraq Coalition of the Willing request: still under review

¶4. (C) A topic during the reconciliation session was an RFMF request dating from January, shortly after Bainimarama visited his troops with UNAMI in Iraq, for the Fiji Government to approve participation in the Coalition of the Willing (ref E). When CENTCOM Commander Abizaid visited Suva in February, he accented to PM Qarase, Vice President Madraiwiwi, and Commodore Bainimarama the U.S. interest in Fiji joining the Coalition (ref F). A few weeks ago, the MFA CEO indicated to Embassy staff that MFA supports Fiji joining the Coalition.

¶5. (C) In an exchange with Foreign Minister Tavola on 8/23, we received word that Home Affairs still had not approached the Cabinet with the RFMF's proposal to join the Coalition. Tavola noted that "a previous Cabinet decision restricts Fiji's involvement to UN-sponsored operations/initiatives. Any derogation from that can only be made by Cabinet." He observed that Home Affairs is the principal interlocutor for

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any such request, which would need to be sanctioned by the Cabinet Subcommittee on UNAMI. On 8/25 in Nadi, Tavola told us the Cabinet Subcommittee on UNAMI was meeting that day, in his absence, and the U.S. Coalition request might come up. We have a meeting with Home Affairs Minister Vosanibola on 8/30 to continue the dialogue on this issue.

Cabinet to consider UN Lebanon request shortly

¶6. (C) A UN request for RFMF participation in the expanded UNIFIL received Fiji media attention on 8/22. That request came as no surprise here, given Fiji's past involvement, including holding the force-commander role just before UNIFIL's downsizing. Tavola indicated Fiji intends to provide the UN a responding offer to help, though "the configuration is still being worked out" and "the offer will obviously be restricted somewhat due to funding problems." Tavola expects Fiji's Cabinet to consider the UNIFIL response at a session this week.

Cabinet's overall review is very broad

¶7. (C) Tavola indicated to us that the current Cabinet PKO review is broad, taking a look at all current and foreseeable PKO opportunities. The Coalition of the Willing option, he said, may certainly be part of that overall review. Tavola noted that the review looks at a variety of possible personnel: from infantry to "engineers, nurses, security guards, etc." It will include consideration of Fiji's desires to improve "labor mobility" and enhance remittances. During CODEL Hyde's recent visit, Tavola raised Fiji's interest in regularizing the status of Fiji-citizen care-givers who are illegally in the U.S. (ref G). Economic statistics indicate that remittances are already the second biggest source of GNP for Fiji, behind only tourism.

Comment

¶8. (C) Regarding the hot-button PKO topics of Iraq and Lebanon, we are aware of a Washington interest in "not robbing Peter to pay Paul," i.e., not having states forsake

the Coalition by shifting PKO resources from Iraq to Lebanon.

We continue to urge Fiji to maintain its UNAMI roles and to make the decision to deploy forces to the Coalition in Iraq. If the proposed deployment to Lebanon is a relatively small contingent, it is possible that Fiji can maintain, even expand, its Iraq numbers as well. If it comes to a choice between joining the Coalition in Iraq or joining UNIFIL, it is very possible that Fiji would opt for Lebanon. Fiji's civilian leaders are clearly more comfortable in a blue-helmet role. At the same time, Fiji's military leaders have been somewhat uncomfortable with the RFMF's limited role in Iraq: basically standing static guard at UN compounds. The RFMF would prefer to be in more active roles with the Coalition in Iraq or, one presumes, with the UN in Lebanon.

DINGER